

# Was there a historical 'Jesus of Nazareth?'

## The use of midrash to create a biographical detail in the gospel story

---

By D.M. Murdock

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is depicted as having been brought up in a city called "Nazareth," a purported biographical detail upon which much speculation has been hung over the centuries as to a "historical" Jewish messiah figure in the gospel story, buried somewhere underneath layers of pious elaboration.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, countless Jesus biographies have been constructed significantly around this purported place of origin that would indicate a historical personage.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, whenever scholars wish to distinguish between the "historical Jesus" and the "Christ of faith," they use this designation "Jesus of Nazareth" to depict the former.

Despite all of this speculation, there exists no hard scientific evidence that the *polis* or "city" of Nazareth as depicted in the New Testament even existed at the time when Christ was supposedly being raised there. Although there exists a centuries-later "historic Nazareth" in Israel, archaeological explorations during the past century have failed to demonstrate any such city of the time in the general vicinity. In reality, it appears that Jesus was made to be "of Nazareth" so that he could be called a "Nazarene" or "Nazoraean/Nazorean," a member of an ancient pre-Christian sect, of which the Old Testament hero Samson was said to have been an adherent as well.

### The 'City' of Nazareth?

The apparent fact that Nazareth was not a bustling "city" at the time of Christ's purported existence has been demonstrated through historical records and archaeological evidence. As independent scholars Frank Zindler, René Salm and others have shown via thorough analysis, there is no mention of a "Nazareth" or "Nazara" in the Old Testament or even in Josephus

---

<sup>1</sup> This position is called "euhemerism" or, for pronunciation's sake, "evemerism," after the ancient Greek philosopher Euhemeros/Euhemerus, who surmised that the gods were ancient kings, queens and heroes whose legends had been deified by the addition of fabulous fairytales and mythical motifs. This process is also called apotheosis, which did happen with some prominent figures such as Alexander the Great and the Egyptian physician Imhotep. All pharaohs and many other kings and rulers have been considered to be living "gods on Earth." Each case must be weighed on its own merit. Thus, mythicists demonstrate specifically that the "Jesus Christ" of the New Testament is a fictional composite of characters, real and mythical, and that such a composite of multiple "people" is therefore no *one*. In other words, when the mythological and midrashic layers, etc., are removed, there remains no "historical" core to the onion.

<sup>2</sup> As an example of the use of this concept "Jesus of Nazareth" as the basis for a "historical" Jesus, in 2012 New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman released his book *Did Jesus Exist?*, which was subtitled *The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*. As Frank Zindler shows in his rebuttal, "Bart's Subtitle," Ehrman fails to meet the burden of proof for this supposed historical personage from a purported place called Nazareth.

centuries later.<sup>3</sup> The first reference to Nazareth in Jewish literature does not occur until the ninth century AD/CE, “only in two songs of lamentation...as the seat of a priestly division...”<sup>4</sup> It seems that, after the “city” became the subject of interest because of the gospels, only then do we find the area inhabited to any significant degree, evidently beginning no earlier than the fourth century AD/CE.

As Zindler remarks in “Where Jesus Never Walked”:

Nazareth is not mentioned even once in the entire Old Testament, nor do any ancient historians or geographers mention it before the beginning of the fourth century. The Talmud, although it names 63 Galilean towns, knows nothing of Nazareth. Josephus, who wrote extensively about Galilee (a region roughly the size of Rhode Island) and conducted military operations back and forth across the tiny territory in the last half of the first century, mentions Nazareth not even once—although he does mention by name 45 other cities and villages of Galilee. This is even more telling when one discovers that Josephus does mention Japha, a village which is just over a mile from present-day Nazareth! Josephus tells us that he was occupied there for some time. Today, Japha can be considered a suburb of Nazareth, but in Josephus’ day, I’ll wager, the people of Japha buried their dead in the tombs of the unnamed necropolis that now underlies the modern city called Nazareth.

In the fifth century, Church father Jerome (*Onomasticon*) claimed Nazareth was a *viculus*, a “little village” or “hamlet,” an indication that it was founded long after its supposed existence as a “city.” Considering the interest in the site and that pilgrims eventually flocked there, this small stature seems inexplicable, unless the case is that any such locality eventually named “Nazareth” or other variant in reality was styled *after* an allegorical place based on OT midrash (interpretation/commentary) and NT contentions.

Despite claims to the contrary, it appears that outside of the New Testament there exists no unambiguous evidence for such a place as the *city* called Nazareth that could have hosted a historical Jesus. In view of all the time and effort spent to find what would likely be numerous artifacts demonstrating these contentions of a pre-Christian Nazareth, it remains noteworthy that no such hard proof has been discovered, again, not for want of looking and digging. In ongoing excavations at the site of “historic Nazareth,” now and again archaeologists claim to have found “Jesus’s neighbor’s house” or some other such artifact such as coins from “before the Jewish uprising.”<sup>5</sup> It has likewise been asserted that a “necropolis” preceded the city; yet, the earliest

---

<sup>3</sup> Transliterations of other relevant terms in the New Testament include Nazareth, Nazarat and Nazarath. The variations may be difficult to explain, for writers purported to be familiar with a city by that name, from which their all-important Lord and Savior had emanated, as well as in consideration of the fact that the evangelists are claimed to have been inspired infallibly by the Holy Spirit. The city-name “Jerusalem” also varies in the New Testament, appearing as Ἱεροσόλυμα or Hierosolyma (G2414) and Ἱερουσαλήμ or Hierousalem (G2419).

<sup>4</sup> Luz, 148.

<sup>5</sup> In December 2009, the media announced that “Jesus’s neighbor’s house” had been found at Nazareth. René Salm analyzed the account and declared it to be false. See my articles “Jesus neighbor’s house found?” and “Nazareth scholar: ‘No house from Jesus’s time found there.’” Concerning this purported find, Salm further remarks: “Typically, no evidence dating to the turn of the era (‘time of Jesus’) has been forthcoming. In addition, the small excavation site was quickly covered up, so that no subsequent investigation is possible. A recently opened pilgrim center now rises on the site, known as the Mary of

tombs in the area so far discovered appear to date to the middle to late first century AD/CE, if that early, decades after Jesus was purported to be living in the midst of this proposed cemetery.

In an article entitled, "Nazareth, Faith and the Dark Option," in response to critics of his book *The Myth of Nazareth: The Invented Town of Jesus*, Salm remarks:

This important article reviews the problem-ridden history of the site's archaeology, revealing that Jesus-era evidence has often been invented in the past by the tradition, is possibly being invented now, and may continue to be invented at Nazareth in the future.<sup>6</sup>

Salm further states:

Archaeologists have been digging at Nazareth for over a hundred years and, as my book attempts to show, all the recovered finds include not a single artefact that can with certainty be dated before 100 CE. In other words, no demonstrable evidence dating either to the time of Jesus or to earlier Hellenistic times has been found. This is quite sufficient to decide the issue against the traditional view of Nazareth. The case is closed! No one, of course, is opposed to ongoing research at Nazareth, but that research will inform us about the nature of the Late Roman-Byzantine village, not about a mythical settlement at the turn of the era. That question has already been answered, and answered convincingly.

With such obviously painstaking searches for a century designed to expose a bustling biblical polis of tremendous significance to Christendom, one would think there would be a much more conclusive archaeological record. Thus, despite the attempts at painting a thriving metropolis at a place called Nazara/Nazareth in pre-Christian times, no material artifact unambiguously illustrates that claim. Proponents' generalities, sophistry and evasions aside, Salm reiterates that the fundamental issue remains "that no evidence of human habitation at Nazareth is extant from c. 730 BCE–ca. 70 CE."

Moreover, it has been surmised that Nazareth lay on a hill, because Luke 4:29 says Jesus was brought to the city pinnacle in order to throw him off. However, the hill in the vicinity of the "historic Nazareth" is too steep for dwellings. This verse in Luke is not a "historical fact" but possibly a midrashic interpretation of an OT "messianic prophecy." The scripture 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 25:12 employs the same verb κατακρημνίζω or *katakremnizo*, meaning "to throw down a precipice," as appears in Luke. Using this same Greek term during the first century BCE, historian Diodorus Siculus (*Library*, 16.28.3) discussed a military conquest in which the prisoners were made to hurl themselves off a precipice. In the second century AD/CE, Roman historian Appian (*Mithridatic* 5.34, *Punic* 17:114 and *Syrian Wars* 7.42) also used the word to describe the treatment of vanquished enemies. Obviously, this "biographical" motif in the New Testament could simply be a literary invention based on a well-known tactic to terrorize one's enemies.

Rather than representing a real "city," it appears that Nazareth was included in the gospel story in order to "fulfill prophecy," as part of a mass of "messianic scriptures" used as "blueprints" to create the NT figure of "Jesus Christ." This allegorical creation follows a long series of

---

Nazareth International Center—with boutique, restaurant and theatre!" In his article "Nazareth: René Salm's preliminary response to Bart Ehrman," Salm also addresses the claim regarding coins raised by Ehrman. Even if coins were found at Nazareth, where is the "city?"

<sup>6</sup> In a number of articles, Salm has addressed the various criticisms of the Nazareth-myth thesis in general and his book in particular, such as in the reviews by Ken Dark and by Stephen J. Pfann and Yehudah Rapuano.

precedents in Judaism, devised through the process of “midrash,” again, the interpretation or commentary of a biblical passage to illustrate a certain point.

### Nazareth as Midrash and Misinterpretation

The midrashic use of an OT “messianic scripture” to create a NT motif is illustrated at Matthew 2:23, in which it is claimed that Jesus was supposed to live in Nazareth in order to “fulfill prophecy”:

And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, “He shall be called a Nazarene.”

The original Greek is:

καὶ ἐλθὼν κατώκησεν εἰς πόλιν λεγομένην **Ναζαρέτ** ὅπως πληρωθῇ τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν ὅτι **Ναζωραῖος** κληθήσεται

Here we see the words “Nazaret” and “Nazoraaios,” the latter usually rendered “Nazarene” or “Nazorean” in English.<sup>7</sup> The Greek NT word Ναζωραῖος/Nazoraaios is defined by *Strong's Concordance of the Bible* (G3480) as:

Nazarite = “one separated”

- 1) an inhabitant of Nazareth
- 2) a title given to Jesus in the NT
- 3) a name given to Christians by the Jews, Ac. 24:5

Thus, Nazarene/Nazoraaios is equated with “Nazarite” or “Nazirite,” as found in the Old Testament, a designation not of a place but of a religious cult, to which Samson likewise was said to belong. Concerning Matthew’s implication that Nazarene comes from Nazareth, Hebrew scholar Robert Eisenman remarks, “This cannot be the derivation of the term, as even in the Greek, the spelling ‘Nazareth’ and ‘Nazoraean’ differ substantially.”<sup>8</sup> Eisenman also comments that “the scriptural reference [in Matthew] clearly aims at evoking *Nazirite*...”<sup>9</sup>

The title Nazoraaios occurs 15 times in the NT, but it is rendered 13 times in the King James Bible (KJV) as “of Nazareth,” while only twice in the KJV is Jesus identified as a “Nazarene.” An alternate spelling Ναζαρηνός or Nazarenos (G3479), defined as “a resident of Nazareth,” occurs at Mark 1:24, 14:67, 16:6 and Luke 4:34. In these four verses, this usage would constitute a demonym or name/cognomen designating a citizen of a particular place, derived not from the Nazarites of the Old Testament but from the supposed city of Nazara/Nazareth.

At Mark 1:24, Christ is called Ἰησοῦ Ναζαρηνέ or “Jesus Nazarene.” At Mark 14:67, the phrase appears as τοῦ Ναζαρηνοῦ Ἰησοῦ, which reads “of the Nazarene Jesus,” not “Jesus of Nazareth.” Mark 16:6 says:

Μὴ ἐκθαμβεῖσθε Ἰησοῦν ζητεῖτε τὸν Ναζαρηνὸν

<sup>7</sup> Other spellings, transliterations and terms related to or confused with Nazarene/Nazorean include Nazrene, Nazarean, Natsarene, Nasaraean, Nasorean, Naassene, etc. For an extensive discussion of these various terms, see the work of Robert Eisenman, who shows that the NT character James the Brother could be deemed an “extreme Nazarite.”

<sup>8</sup> Eisenman (1998), 243.

<sup>9</sup> Eisenman (1998), 249.

This verse translates literally as:

Do not be terrified Jesus you seek the Nazarene

In the KJV or Authorized Version of the Bible, this noun Nazarenos in each instance is rendered in English not “Nazarene” but “of Nazareth.” The fact is that Ναζαρηνός or Nazarenos does not appear in the Greek Old Testament/Septuagint or other extant pre-Christian literature. Why is there no previous such designation, if Nazareth was already a “city” at the time Jesus was supposedly raised there? It appears that the term Nazarenos was specifically created to describe Jesus, as the word “Christians” likewise was invented for his followers. Thus, either pre-Christian residents were never called by a comparable name in Greek, or there evidently *were* no other such “Nazarenes,” as a strict demonym, running about the Levant before Christianity.

It is true that many individuals in antiquity were identified by their place of origin, such as Lucius Cyrenensis and Diodorus Siculus. It is likewise apparently true that there was no such place as the “city of Nazareth” during the era in question, that there *was* a brotherhood called the Nazarites, and that many people in antiquity *also* were called by religious designations. In the NT itself, for example, we read about Σίμων ὁ ζηλωτής or “Simon the Zealot” (Acts 1:13), so named for his zealotry for the Jewish law.

This scenario of a religious *title*, not a demonym, constitutes the only logical way in which the messiah as “Nazarene” could represent “fulfillment of prophecy” in scripture. The fact remains that this demonym “Nazarenos” apparently did not exist until it was devised in the New Testament, for the specific purpose of identifying Jesus as having come from a place called Nazareth—for which there is no real evidence of the time—conflating this concept instead with the religious order of the Nazarites/Nazirites.

Concerning titles and demonyms in the Bible, biblical scholar Robert M. Price comments:

In the same way Micah the Levite would be thought in one period to mean “Micah the oracle,” but in another “Micah from the tribe of Levi,” Jesus the Nazorean would first be understood as “Jesus the Sectarian” and only later as “Jesus from Nazareth.”<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, it has been pointed out that, if the intent was to designate a resident of a city, the proper demonym would be Nazarethenos, Nazarethanos or Nazarethaois, rather than Nazoraiois, Nazorean or Nazarene.<sup>11</sup> These latter designations would be appropriate for a noun from the Hebrew root words נָזַר/*naziyr* (H5139), also transliterated *nazir*, and נָזַר/*nazar* (H5144), meaning “dedicate,” “consecrate” or “separate” in a religious fashion.

## No ‘Jesus of Nazareth’

The various NT references to “Nazareth, where he had been brought up” (Lk 4:16) are obviously designed to explain the supposed “prophecy” that the awaited deliverer would be styled “Nazoraiois,” “Nazarene” or “Nazarite.” Appearing a mere dozen times in the New Testament, the word for “Nazareth,” which is also written Ναζαρά or Nazara (Strong’s G3478), is defined as:

Nazareth = “the guarded one”

<sup>10</sup> Price, 54.

<sup>11</sup> Guignebert, 82.

## 1) the ordinary residence and home town of Christ

However, Christ is actually never called “Jesus of Nazareth” in the Greek gospels. He is “Jesus the Nazoraioi/Nazarene,” “Jesus the one from Nazareth” or “Jesus the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee,” this latter as at Matthew 21:11:

Ἰησοῦς ὁ προφήτης ὁ ἀπὸ Ναζαρέτ τῆς Γαλιλαίας

Mark 1:9 comes next close of the evangelists to writing “Jesus of Nazareth”:

And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. (Mk 1:9)

The relevant Greek here is ἦλθεν Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ Ναζαρέτ τῆς Γαλιλαίας, which could be rendered “came Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee.” In this case, however, the phrase is not a moniker or demonym; rather, “*in those days* he came *from* Nazareth to the Jordan” refers to a *journey* at that time.

In Luke’s gospel, Jesus is never even associated with Nazareth in the same verse in which the city-name appears; hence, no phrase “Jesus of Nazareth” appears in that book either. We do find, however, at Luke 24:19 a reference to Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου or “(of) Jesus the Nazoraioi.”

In John (1:45), we read Ἰησοῦν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Ἰωσήφ τὸν ἀπὸ Ναζαρέτ or “Jesus the son of Joseph the one from Nazareth.” The grammar makes it clear it is the *son* who is from Nazareth, not Joseph, but, again, there is no direct “Jesus of Nazareth” designation.

Furthermore, in this passage John specifically states that this “Jesus the son of Joseph the one from Nazareth” had been prophesied by Moses and the prophets, when in reality we find no such specific “prophecy” in the Bible. What we *do* discover are many “messianic blueprints” that could be cobbled together and elaborated upon to create such a figure in the New Testament.

Concerning this passage, Eisenman comments:

At this point, too, John is anxious to mask the true thrust of the “Nazaraean” terminology, which, as we have been discovering, means “Keeper”—either “Keeper of the Law” or “Keeper of the Secrets”—transforming it into Nazareth.<sup>12</sup>

Following this passage in John, at 1:46 we read the famous line “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Perhaps not, if it was only a necropolis at the time John’s gospel was written, sometime during the *second* century.<sup>13</sup>

When Christ is on the cross in John (19:19), he is designated “Jesus the Nazoraioi,” not “Jesus of Nazareth,” the sign reading:

Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων

Jesus the Nazoraioi, King of the Jews

<sup>12</sup> Eisenman (1998), 841.

<sup>13</sup> Although the canonical gospels are frequently dated to the last quarter of the first century, there remains no clear and unambiguous evidence of their emergence in the historical record before the last quarter of the *second* century at which point they suddenly begin to be discussed by a number of Church fathers. For more information, see my books *Suns of God* and *Who Was Jesus?*, as well as Walter Cassels’s excellent study *Supernatural Religion*.

“Nazoraioi” or “Nazarene” as referring to a cult and not an ethnic designation is also indicated when Paul is deemed the “ringleader of the Nazoraioi” in the book of Acts (24:5), specifically said there to be a *sect*, not a demonym, appropriate since neither the apostle nor any of his followers was said to be from Nazareth. The argument could be made, of course, that by this time followers of “Jesus of Nazareth” were called “Nazarenes,” even though they did not come from there. However, again, the term here is not the demonym “Nazarenes” but the same word defined by Strong’s as “Nazarite,” the sect/cult in the Old Testament.

The closest we get to the phrase “Jesus of Nazareth” in the New Testament is also in Acts (10:38), a book that, according to scientific inspection, does not emerge clearly in the literary/historical record until long after the purported events: To wit, we find no trace of this text until the last quarter of the *second* century.<sup>14</sup> In Acts, Jesus is referred to as Ἰησοῦν τὸν ἀπὸ Ναζαρέτ or “Jesus the one from Nazareth.”

Thus, only once do we find in the New Testament a comparable designation as “Jesus of Nazareth”—in *Acts*, not the gospels—and the rest of the time he is either “a prophet from Nazareth” or “Jesus the Nazarene,” etc. This fact remains largely unknown because translations consistently render “Jesus the Nazarene” as “Jesus of Nazareth.”

In addition, in citing the later word for “Christians” by rabbinical Jews, *Nozrim*, Eisenman remarks:

The term probably cannot derive from the word “Nazareth,” although Nazareth could derive from it—that is, there could be a city in Galilee which derived its name from the expression *Nazoraean* in Hebrew, but not the other way around as the Gospels seem to prefer.<sup>15</sup>

The conclusion appears to be that the “historical” Jesus from a city called “Nazareth” in reality consists of messianic blueprints designed to make of the awaited savior a Nazarite or consecrated member of an evidently important religious order. In other words, the gospel writers created an allegorical or midrashic “Nazareth” in which to place their fictional messiah, who was to be consecrated to God or a Nazarite, from the womb and for life.

### **Nazara as ‘the Truth’**

The concept of “the Nazoraioi” as a religious title, rather than serving as a demonym of a historical individual, is exemplified also in the non-canonical Gospel of Philip:

The apostles who were before us had these names for him: “Jesus, the Nazorean, Messiah,” that is, “Jesus, the Nazorean, the Christ.” The last name is “Christ,” the first is “Jesus,” that in the middle is “the Nazarene.” “Messiah” has two meanings, both “the Christ” and “the measured.” Jesus” in Hebrew is “the redemption.” “Nazara” is “the truth.” “The Nazarene,” then, is “the truth.” “Christ” has been measured. “The Nazarene” and “Jesus” are they who have been measured.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> See the detailed scholarship of Cassels’s *Supernatural Religion*.

<sup>15</sup> Eisenman (1998), 250.

<sup>16</sup> Barnstone, 91-92.

Here we see that “the Nazorean/Nazarene” is a *title* comparable to “the Messiah” and “the Christ.” It is meant to designate not a place called “Nazareth” but that Jesus is *allegorically* “the truth.”

We receive a further indication of these facts from Church father Epiphanius. As Price remarks:

Epiphanius, an early Christian cataloguer of “heresies,” mentions a pre-Christian sect called “the Nazoreans,” their name meaning “the Keepers of the Torah,” or possibly of the secrets (see Mark 4:11...). These Nazoreans were the heirs, supposedly, of the neoprimitivist sect of the Rechabites descending from the times of Jeremiah (Jer. 35:1-10). They were rather like Gypsies, itinerant carpenters.<sup>17</sup>

Of this heresy-cataloguer we also read:

Epiphanius uses the spelling nasaraioi (Νασαραῖοι), which he attempts to distinguish from the spelling nazoraioi in parts of the New Testament, as a Jewish-Christian sect. According to the testimony of Epiphanius against the 4<sup>th</sup> century Nazarenes, he reports them as having pre-Christian origins. He writes: “(6,1) They did not call themselves Nasaraeans either; the Nasaraean sect was before Christ, and did not know Christ. 6,2 But besides, as I indicated, everyone called the Christians Nazoraean,” (*Adversus Haereses*, 29.6).<sup>18</sup>

A tortuous effort is made by Epiphanius to differentiate these various groups, but it is clear that the reason for Christ being called a Nazarene is according to a “prophecy” that could only have revolved around a religious sect, the same order in the OT, which was pre-Christian.<sup>19</sup>

## Blueprint Not Prophecy

As is the case with much else in the Bible, the “prophecy” supposedly fulfilled at Matthew 2:23, in which the messiah was to be called “Nazoraioi,” is not a prophecy at all. The very phrase “fulfill prophecy” in the NT, in fact, is an indication of midrash of a messianic “blueprint” from the Old Testament.<sup>20</sup> In this regard, no such “prophecy” is known from the Old Testament. Some have surmised that the “prophecy” being cited in Matthew 2:23 is from Isaiah 11:1, which discusses the “branch” (נֶצֶר *netser*) from the “roots” of Jesse and is one of the most famous “messianic scriptures,” as is much of the rest of the book. Indeed, one could analyze the rest of Isaiah as well for numerous “blueprints” used in the creation of the composite Christ character. If this “prophecy” involves Isaiah 11:1, then it refers to a *title*, not a place, and no such place is necessary to make of Jesus a Nazarite.

Moreover, it is also possible, if not probable, that the Nazarene “prophecy” derives from the *past* story of Samson, in which the awaited one who would “deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines [‘immigrants’]” was to be a Nazarite or Nazirite, one who is consecrated. (Jdg 13:5, 7; Num 6:2, 13, 18, etc.) The Greek word for “Nazarite” at Judges 13:5 is ναζῖρ or *nazir*, from the Hebrew נָזִיר or *nazir* (H5139), meaning:

- 1) consecrated or devoted one, Nazarite

<sup>17</sup> Price, 53.

<sup>18</sup> “Nazarene (title),” en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazarene\_(title)

<sup>19</sup> For a further discussion of Epiphanius and Nazareth, see Eisenman (1998), 243; (2006), 513, etc.

<sup>20</sup> See my article “Did Jesus Fulfill Prophecy?” and the chapter by the same name in my book *Who Was Jesus?* for examples of OT “prophecies” or other scriptures used overtly in the New Testament.



- a) consecrated one
- b) devotee, Nazarite
- c) untrimmed (vine)

The word translated “Nazarites” at Lamech 4:7 is ναζιπαῖοι or Naziraioi. *A Handy Concordance of the Septuagint* cites the word ναζειραιος or *nazeiraios* as an alternate for ναζι/*nazi* and ναζιρ/*nazir*. The term Nazarenos never appears in the Old Testament and, again, was evidently created specifically to deem Jesus a “Nazarene,” as a demonym of a resident from the “city of Nazareth.” There is no indication before that time of any such city or residents with this moniker.

The Greek word for “to deliver” at Judges 13:5 is σωσαι or *sosai*, from the verb σώζω/*sozo*, meaning “to save.” Hence, in this Samson myth we have a Nazarite/Nazarene who will save Israel from its enemies—not unlike the Jesus savior figure of the NT. Samson, whose very name (שמשון *Shimshon*) means “like a sun” (H8123), possesses a number of solar attributes—such as his “hair” or rays “cut” by Delilah, the moon goddess—and we can see in this tale a Jewish precedent for elaborating on ancient *myths* to inflate and validate religious claims.

As a related aside for further research, the pre-Christian Nazarites may have become the Natsarenes or Nasoreans, priests of the Mandaean, who have been associated not only with John the Baptist but also, significantly, have evidently served as a *carpenter* sect.<sup>21</sup> In *James the Brother of Jesus* and *The New Testament Code*, Eisenman goes into greater detail as to what it meant to be a Nazarite/Nazirite, providing extensive discussions of various religious sects and the consecrated ascetic status. He also highlights the importance of such pious “separation” in the Dead Sea scrolls, tracing this lineage to the New Testament and Christian tradition as well.

When these various scriptures and the many more “messianic prophecies,” such as the “Man of Sorrows” and “Suffering Servant” of Isaiah 53, are factored together, it becomes evident that, in the composition of the New Testament, the Old Testament or Tanakh was used to flesh out a “midrashic” or *fictional* messiah figure.

Considering all the time and effort spent to find what would undoubtedly be numerous artifacts demonstrating a pre-Christian Nazareth, it remains noteworthy that no such hard proof has been discovered. Even if there was some sort of a settlement—not a “city”—we are left with no confirming evidence of a Jesus from there who rose to tremendous prominence during the first third of the first century.

---

<sup>21</sup> For more on this subject of Mandaean, Nazorean and John the Baptist, etc., see my book *Suns of God: Krishna, Buddha and Christ Unveiled* (531ff). There is much reason to surmise that John the Baptist, rather than representing a purely “historical” figure, constitutes a compilation of characters such as the Babylonian god Oannes the Water-god and the Egyptian god Anubis the Purifier. Again, see *Suns of God*, as well as my book *Christ in Egypt* for more information. We have seen Price’s comment above about “itinerant carpenters.” In the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (“Mandaean,” 17:557), we read, “As regards secular occupation, the present Mandaean are goldsmiths, ironworkers, and house and ship carpenters.” It is further suggestive that the Gospel of Philip emphasizes the occupation of Jesus’s stepfather, Joseph, as a carpenter. (Barnstone, 96) The same can be said of the emphasis on the carpenter in the Gnostic/Mandaean Book of John the Baptist, in which we can see the relationship between the allegorical carpenter and divinity: “Let me warn you, my brothers, of the god which the carpenter has joinered together. If the carpenter has joinered together the god, who then has joinered together the carpenter?” (See G.R.S. Mead) The god or hero as carpenter is a recurring theme in mythology. (See, e.g., *Suns of God*, 366ff.)

Rather than serving as “biography” and “history,” the tale about Nazareth constitutes interpretive midrash, designed not to record a “biographical” detail of a “historical” Jesus but to explain the purported OT “prophecy” of the awaited messiah as a “Nazarite,” a member of an obviously important religious order. This detail is evidently intended at once to fulfill this apparent “messianic scripture” and to anchor the fictional Jesus character in “history.”

## Bibliography

- “Nazarene (title).” en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazarene\_(title)
- “Nazareth.” en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazareth
- Acharya S. *Suns of God: Krishna, Buddha and Christ Unveiled*. IL: AUP, 2004.  
(See also “Murdock, D.M.”)
- Barnstone, Willis, ed. *The Other Bible*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1980.
- Cassels, Walter Richard. *Supernatural Religion: An Inquiry into the Reality of Divine Revelation*. London: Watts & Co., 1902.
- Dark, Ken. “The Myth of Nazareth: The Invented Town of Jesus.” *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society*, vol. 26 (2008), pp. 140–146.
- Ehrman, Bart D. *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*. New York: HarperOne, 2012.
- Eisenman, Robert. *James the Brother of Jesus: The Key to Unlocking the Secrets of Early Christianity and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Penguin, 1998.  
—*The New Testament Code: The Cup of the Lord, the Damascus Covenant, and the Blood of Christ*. London: Watkins Publishing, 2006.
- Guignebert, Charles. *Jesus*. New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1956.
- Luz, Ulrich, et al. *Matthew 1-7: A Continental Commentary*. Augsburg, MN: Fortress Press, 1989.
- Murdock, D.M. “Jesus neighbor’s house found.” freethoughtnation.com/contributing-writers/63-acharya-s/224-jesus-neighbors-house-found.html  
—*Who Was Jesus? Fingerprints of The Christ*. Seattle, WA: Stellar House Publishing, 2007.  
(See also “Acharya S”)
- Pfann, Stephen, and Yehudah Rapuano. “On the Nazareth Village Farm Report: A Reply to Salm.” *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society*, vol. 26 (2008), pp. 105–108.
- Price, Robert M. *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003.
- Rudolph, Kurt. *Mandaeism*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978.
- Salm, René. “An Essential Nazareth Bibliography.” www.nazarethmyth.info/bibl.html  
—“Nazareth, Faith, and the Dark Option—an Update.”  
www.nazarethmyth.info/naz3article.html  
—“Nazareth: René Salm’s preliminary response to Bart Ehrman.”  
vridar.wordpress.com/2012/05/16/nazareth-rene-salms-preliminary-response-to-bart-ehrman/  
—“Nazareth scholar: ‘No house from Jesus’s time found there’.”  
freethoughtnation.com/contributing-writers/53-archaeology-archaeoastronomy/225-nazareth-scholar-no-house-from-jesus-time-found-there.html
- Salm, René. *The Myth of Nazareth: The Invented Town of Jesus*. ed. Frank Zindler. American Atheist Press, 2008.
- Zindler, Frank. “Bart’s Subtitle.” freethoughtnation.com/contributing-writers/76-frank-zindler/685-jesus-of-what-a-response-by-frank-zindler-to-bart-ehrman.html  
—“Where Jesus Never Walked.” www.atheists.org/content/where-jesus-never-walked